

# Excellence and Professionalism Remain Priorities for NCIS

By Laurie Langstraat, NCIS

While there wasn't a lot of "breaking news" for the crop insurance industry in 2017, there were still program changes, weather events, Congressional hearings, and other day-to-day activities that kept the industry and NCIS working hard.

The U.S. House of Representatives held their first Farm Bill hearing of the year on February 15, shortly after the crop insurance industry convened the 2017 annual convention. The Senate quickly followed with "Hearing from the Heartland" on February 23 in Manhattan, Kan., home state of one of crop insurance's congressional champions, Sen. Pat Roberts.

The Senate followed this hearing with six additional Farm Bill hearings throughout the year, and the House held 18 more hearings and six listening sessions scattered around the country.

One of the most popular mantras by farmers, ag leaders, economists, and others who either attended or testified at these events was "do no harm" to crop insurance.

The drought in the Upper Plains held on a long time in the Dakotas, but some farmers were still able to squeak out a decent yield. Wildfires in the Northwest wreaked havoc on specialty crop growers, including hundreds of acres of wine grapes in California. These fires, and the blueberry/peach freeze in Georgia and South Carolina, and the late freeze/snow in Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, all warranted the release of emergency procedures or additional claims guidance from the Risk Management Agency (RMA). August and September were interrupted by hurricanes Harvey and Irma, and late in the year,

wildfires wreaked havoc in California.

Through it all, NCIS staff monitored these events and other crop insurance changes, providing guidance and counsel on issues that affected our membership. This article contains a snapshot of some of the activities, events, and work NCIS and its staff accomplished in 2017.

## Meetings and Conferences

### *NCIS Regional/State Crop Insurance Committees*

NCIS Regional/state committee annual meetings always lead off the NCIS year and standing committee meetings wrap up the first few months of our activity. In between these important meetings, we host the Claims Manager Conference and Crop Insurance Industry Annual Convention.

Regional/state committees are authorized by the NCIS Bylaws and are organized to:

1. Recommend coverage and language changes to the Crop-Hail and Federal policy forms and loss adjustment procedures;
2. Promote communication and cooperation within the crop insurance industry;
3. Provide a forum for the discussion of claims related issues in compliance with Federal and state law, including antitrust laws; and,
4. Promote and participate in risk management education activities.

These committees meet to discuss the events of the previous year and plan for events in the year ahead. Highlights from the 2017 meetings include:

- Dr. Marisol Berti made a presentation on cover crop use in the Upper Great Plains during the Minnesota/North Dakota/South Dakota



The Iowa and Nebraska NCIS Regional/State Committees held their 2017 annual meetings together because so many of the participants are active in both Committees.



The participants at the risk management education workshop in Maryland in February broke into smaller groups based on their type of farming operations (dairy, row crop, livestock, etc.) to discuss topics relevant to them.

annual meeting.

- Topics discussed during the Colorado/Wyoming annual meeting included Whole-Farm Revenue Protection, Malting Barley Endorsement, professional conduct, and program integrity.
- The guest speaker at the Southwest meeting was Mary Sasser, manager of field operations from the office of the Texas State Chemist. Ms. Sasser gave an update on the One Sample Strategy for aflatoxin risk management in Texas.
- Mike Smith, project manager from the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) gave the history of the CTIC and cover crop usage to attendees at the Indiana/Michigan/Ohio annual meeting.
- Dr. Emerson Nafziger, University of Illinois Extension, presented information on recent NCIS corn and soybean research at the Illinois/Wisconsin meeting.
- The Gulf State Committee welcomed Michael Plumblee from Mississippi State University who updated the group on the NCIS cotton research project and Mariano Lerma and Roddrick Bell, RMA, who spoke about regional issues.
- Gary McManus, Oklahoma state climatologist, was the guest speaker at the Kansas/Oklahoma meeting. He provided a synopsis of Oklahoma weather since 2010 and current drought conditions.
- Norm Groot, executive director of the Monterey (Calif.) County Farm Bureau, addressed the Arizona/California/Nevada Committee

on the importance of agriculture commodities in the county and water projects.

- Greg Oetting, Topeka RMA Regional Office (RO), updated the Missouri annual meeting attendees on policy statement changes affecting Missouri crops and Doug Newland, Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided information on various FSA programs and initiatives.
- Ben Thiel, Spokane RMA RO, provided a review of the 2016 activities and issues from that office and presented Whole-Farm Revenue Program tax filing reports and claims scenarios to the Montana/Northwest committee attendees.
- The East/Southeast Committees hosted Gary Spires from the South Carolina Farm Bureau who discussed the current political environment and the effects they may have on agriculture in South Carolina.

After the completion of these annual meetings, NCIS holds training for the regional/state committee chairmen or vice chairmen. The two-day session prepares these individuals to conduct meetings efficiently and effectively and gives them a broader perspective on NCIS functions and activities. The training, held March 28-29, included adherence to antitrust laws, applicable NCIS bylaws, making effective recommendations, the NCIS research program and how committees can help develop future projects, parliamentary procedure, planning effective annual meetings and schools, and many other topics. The chairmen also discuss issues and conditions that affected



**Tom Zacharias** (left) and **Laurence Crane** (right) at the USDA Outlook Forum. Also in attendance was **Helena Hollins** (center). Ms. Hollins, one of the Outlook Forum Student Diversity Program winners, is attending Langston University in Oklahoma and is one of NCIS' 1890 Scholarship recipients.

their areas the past year and any that could have an effect on the upcoming season's crops.

### *NCIS Standing Committees*

After the regional/state committees wrap up their annual meetings and submit any recommended policy or procedure changes to NCIS, the seven NCIS standing committees meet. Members of these committees are selected by



**Laurence Crane** (far right) led a planning and orientation session with extension educators from North Carolina who were involved in that state's NCIS Risk Management Education project.



**Tom Zacharias** addressed the attendees at the “Harvesting Farm Bill Perspectives” Farm Bill Summit in March.

their companies as subject matter experts and are tasked with discussing and moving recommendations through to the NCIS Program Development Committee, or sending them back to the respective regional/state committee for more information. The committees also discuss other issues at these meetings, and most have monthly or quarterly conference calls to stay on top of issues or changes as they arise.

Highlights from the standing committee meetings include:

- The MPCI Underwriting and Operations (U&O) Committee held a joint discussion with RMA during part of their meeting to discuss unit structures, draft APH regulation, perennial crop issues, policy and procedure updates for 2018, Regional Office Exceptions Scorecard initiative, 508(h) products, Conservation Compliance, and other topics.
- The Crop-Hail Policy, Procedures and Loss Adjustment (CHPPLA) Committee discussed Crop-Hail provisions and loss adjustment, the Crop Adjuster Proficiency Program (CAPP), and watched the new NCIS program integrity and professional conduct videos.
- The Technology and Information Processing (TIP) Committee discussed Crop-Hail issues, including 2016 processing, 2016 data review results, 2017 updates and 2018 pending changes. The group also met with RMA to discuss actuarial updates, production data transmission, new product processing issues, ACRSI, draft Resource Land Unit data stan-



Participants at the North Carolina A&T State University Small Farms Week Kickoff.

dards, Common Land Unit shapefile release frequency, and several other items.

- Outreach activities to educate farmers and other industries about crop insurance, including several risk management education sessions in Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Delaware, and Maryland were discussed during the Communications & Outreach Committee meeting held in early May.
- The Crop-Hail Actuarial & Statistics (A&S) Committee reviewed results of the 2018 Final Average Loss Cost (FALC) filing analyses for several states, as well as Production Plan factor methodology and Rain Insurance.

### *Training Conferences*

NCIS also held three training conferences for member company trainers, underwriters, and supervisors to learn about new or changing policies and procedure for the upcoming crop year.

- **2017 Claims Manger Conference**  
More than 155 claims and compliance managers, RMA participants and NCIS staff met in mid-January for the annual Claims Manager Conference. The guest speakers included Heather Manzano, RMA Compliance, who addressed the improper payment rate, AIP performance reviews, and the 2017 monitoring programs. Chris Daly from Oregon State University and Ryan Spellman from the National Wildlife Federation, were also guest speakers. Chuck Lee, NCIS, Kurt Henke, Henke-Bufkin Law Firm, and Brad Meyer, Rain and Hail counsel, led a legal panel discussion focused on crop insurance disputes. Presentations by RMA and NCIS staff included Crop-Hail and MPCI Loss Handbooks, LAM updates, research results, precision ag,

potatoes, and adjuster licensing.

- **2018 Train the Trainer Fall Conference**

More than 240 participants attended this important national conference designed for NCIS training contacts and company training personnel. Updated technical information and training materials needed to prepare and conduct company fall training for the 2018 crop year were provided. Guest speakers Christy Seyfert, RCIS, and Stephen Frerichs, Rain and Hail, gave an “Update from the Hill” and Alex Offerdahl, Watts and Associates, gave an update on Margin Protection.

- **2018 Train-the-Trainer Spring Conference**

The NCIS Train-the-Trainer Spring Conference was held November 8-9 and focused on new or updated policy and handbook information. NCIS speakers presented information on Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), crop provisions, the Document and Supplemental Standards Handbook, and Basic Provisions. RMA presented on Conservation Compliance and “Back to Basics-Perennials.” Guest speakers included Jonathan Coppess, Illinois Department of Agriculture and Economics, and Kurt Henke, Henke Bufkin Law Firm. Mr. Coppess presented a farm bill update and Mr. Henke discussed WFRP from a legal perspective. NCIS staff, Frank Schnapp, Matt South, and Tom Zacharias, presented information pertaining to the SRA, GAO report, and the historical performance of the program.

### *Crop Insurance Annual Convention*

The 2017 Crop Insurance Industry Annual Convention was held in Bonita Springs, Florida,



**Laurence Crane** (left) helps a farmer at one of the Risk Management Education sessions in Alabama.

in early February. Rep. Collin Peterson (D-MN) opened the general session with remarks about the importance of crop insurance. Mr. Peterson, who was the House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member at the time of the Convention, called crop insurance “the safety net that really works for producers.” RMA’s Heather Manzano, Acting Administrator, and Richard Flournoy, Deputy Administrator, provided an update on several RMA items, including the 2016 Improper Payment Rate. USDA Chief Economist, Dr. Robert Johannson, gave a presentation on the state of the farm economy, and the Ag Economist Panel

of Drs. Randy Fortenberry, Mechel Paggi, James Richardson, and Gary Scnitkey, spoke about the upcoming farm bill negotiations and provided additional information on the farm economy. Attendees also enjoyed a question and answer session with golf commentator and all around good guy, David Feherty.

### *Other Meetings*

- *Whole-Farm Revenue Protection Informational Meetings*

Dean Strasser and AIP panel representatives Joy Ratliff, Gary Heilig, and Dave Paul par-

ticipated in Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) informational meetings organized by RMA in the East and Northeast regions in late October. Meetings were held in Raleigh, NC, Harrisburg, PA, and Syracuse, NY. Attendees included agents, RMA Risk Management Partners, and AIPs. Joy, Gary, and Dave shared their expertise in areas such as building the total insurance package (maintaining Crop-Hail and individual MPCl policies for spot loss coverage) and obtaining proper documentation to support information necessary to underwrite policies. Dean highlighted the ongoing training efforts of the industry and how NCIS utilizes its committee structure to continually recommend improvements to crop insurance programs. RMA provided information on the participation and growth of WFRP, coverage levels being purchased, a look at various farm profiles and the diversification of farms purchasing coverage, development and maintenance of the commodity code listings, and a look at what’s new for the 2018 crop year.

- *Data Mining Steering Committee Meeting*

Members of the Risk Management Agency’s (RMA) Business Analytics Division and the Center for Agribusiness Excellence met with representatives of the Data Mining Steering Committee October 25-26. The group’s discussion focused on potential improvements when reporting the results of the Approved Insurance Provider (AIP)-conducted quality



Members of the NCIS Technology and Information Processing (TIP) Committee.



**Laurence Crane** (right) received the Outstanding Research Award from the Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center.

control reviews as well as areas where efficiencies could be gained in the quality control review processes.

## Participation in Professional Societies and Other Conferences

NCIS staff regularly participate in various

professional organizations and meetings to exchange information with other agricultural economists and academia about the importance of crop insurance.

### *Western Risk and Insurance Association Meeting*

Frank Schnapp participated in the Western Risk and Insurance Association (WRIA) annual

meeting held in Santa Barbara, Calif. The WRIA is primarily interested in the application of statistics to business decisions, but also provides a means of sharing new ideas and approaches on issues relating to risk and insurance among academics, economists, actuaries, risk management professionals, and financial professionals. Frank's presentation reexamined the concept of systematic risk underlying the well-known Capital Asset Pricing Model by applying the same approach to the pricing of insurance.

### *Crop Insurance Conference 2017*

The 24th Annual Crop Insurance Conference was held in Fargo, N.D., January 16. This conference is sponsored by the North Dakota State University Extension Service and the Department of Agribusiness and Applied Economics. It is attended by crop insurance agents, underwriters, commodity group representatives, legislators, and farmers. Tom Zacharias presented a crop insurance industry outlook.

### *Southern Agricultural Economics Association*

NCIS participated in the Southern Agricultural Economics Association (SAEA) Annual Meeting, February 4-7 in Mobile, Ala. The meeting is a forum where agricultural economists in the southern states and Caribbean discuss their research, teaching and outreach programs. Laurence Crane made a presentation highlighting the results of a grant-funded project where he conducted a series of workshops in Mississippi in cooperation with Alcorn State University, providing marketing planning education to limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers. This was one of three projects funded by the Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC), operated by the University of Arkansas, that were selected for the conference. Each year the SRMEC recognizes the top three projects who the advisory council deems to have been most successful in delivering effective programs.

### *USDA Ag Outlook Meeting*

The USDA held its 93rd Agricultural Outlook Forum in Washington, D.C., February 23-24 with the theme, "A New Horizon: The Future of Agriculture." Tom Zacharias, Laurence Crane, and Harun Bulut attended the event. The forum featured keynote speaker, Rep. Mike Conaway, U.S. House Agriculture Committee Chairman. Remarks and presentations were made by Iowa Governor Terry Branstad; Dr. Robert Johansson,



Adjusters examine canola plants at the school in Stillwater, Oklahoma.



A group of adjusters at the Bradford Research Center in Columbia, Missouri, host site of the 2017 Crop-Hail Wheat, Corn and Soybean School and Field Day.

USDA chief economist; Zippy Duvall, American Farm Bureau Federation president; and other agricultural leaders. Tom Zacharias made a panel presentation explaining how crop insurance is the cornerstone of the farm safety net.

### ***Farm Bill Summit***

NCIS participated in and was a sponsor of the Farm Bill Summit held in Washington, D.C. March 20. Agri-Pulse Communications hosted the event at the National Press Club. Most AIPs were represented. The importance of a strong farm safety net, especially given the tough times in farm country, was a sentiment that was shared by many speakers, which included all four leaders of the House and Senate Agriculture committees. Providing an early outlook on the 2018 Farm Bill, the Summit also included panels on risk management, budget challenges, conservation, bridging the gap between farm and food policy and how to attract the next generation of farmers.

### ***Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences Conference***

NCIS participated in the 32nd Annual Career Fair and Training Conference of the Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) in Pittsburg, Pa. MANRRS is a non-profit organization that promotes and fosters the inclusion of underrepresented minorities in agriculture, natural resources, and related disciplines. The conference provided a forum for student and professional members from private industry, government, and academia to interact and promote scholarly excellence, professional development, networking, and career placement. More than 1,000 individuals partici-



A delegation from Germany visited NCIS in July to learn about U.S. crop insurance. Staff discussed the history of the program, the role of private industry in delivery, and the functions NCIS performs for its members.

ated in the conference and Laurence Crane represented the crop insurance industry to discuss opportunities for MANRRS members to pursue careers in the industry.

### ***American Bar Association (ABA) Section of Antitrust Law Spring Meeting***

Chuck Lee attended the Annual Spring Meeting of the ABA Section of Antitrust Law — the premier event of the year for antitrust professionals worldwide. The event drew nearly 3,000 people, including 600 government enforcers and practitioners from 60 countries outside the Unit-

ed States. Sessions attended by Chuck included “Agency Update with the U.S. Department of Justice;” “Do Cartel Fines Measure Anti-Competitive Harm;” “The DOJ Leniency Program at 25;” “Antitrust Enforcement Priorities for the New Administration;” and, “The Enforcers’ Roundtable.” Presenters at the sessions included the deputy assistant attorneys general of the Justice Department’s Antitrust Division; the chair of the Federal Trade Commission; the director general of the European Commission’s Directorate General for Competition; and the chief of the economic litigation section, U.S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division.



Adjusters gather in a wheat plot at the Champaign, Illinois, school and field day.



Adjusters spent time assessing rice losses at the Crop-Hail Rice school in Mississippi.

### ***National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) Spring Meeting***

Tom Zacharias and Dean Strasser attended the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) spring meeting held in Denver, Colo., April 8-11. Dean provided an informational update on the Crop Adjuster Proficiency Program (CAPP) to the Crop Insurance Working Group. Tom and Dean also met with the NAIC Advisory Organization Examination and Oversight Working Group.

### ***2017 AIR Worldwide Presentation***

Tom Zacharias presented a Crop Insurance Industry Update at the AIR Crop Insurance

Symposium, organized by AIR Worldwide. This annual event, held in Boston, Mass., May 18-19, provides a forum for its international audience to gather information from the insurance industry, academia and the U.S. government. Other guest speakers included Dr. Robert Johansson, chief economist at USDA; Dr. Keith Coble, Mississippi State University; Dr. Bruce Sherrick, University of Illinois; Rémi Villeneuve, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada; Chris Aulbur, USDA, Risk Management Agency; and Barry Goodwin, North Carolina State University.

### ***NCIS Meets with Austrian Agricultural Study Group***

Tom Zacharias and Sherri Scharff met with members of the Austrian Agricultural Study Tour

in Des Moines, Iowa to discuss crop insurance. The group also visited a hybrid seed company, several farms, and the Chicago Board of Trade. The tour was led by Dr. Kurt Weinberger who, in addition to his corporate responsibilities, serves on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Agricultural Production Insurers (AIAG).

### ***Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture Annual Meeting***

Laurence Crane attended the Northeastern Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NEASDA) annual meeting in Cooperstown, N.Y., June 12-15. Their annual meeting provided an opportunity to discuss current trends and issues in agriculture in the region and review new policy solutions and regulations in the respective states. More than 120 agriculture policy professionals at the state and federal level attended and provided input. The NEASDA states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont) are classified as Targeted States by RMA for special emphasis in risk management education.

### ***2017 AgGateway Mid-Year Meeting***

Jessica Trites Rolle participated in the 2017 AgGateway Mid-Year Meeting in Altoona, Iowa, June 12-14, including leading the Data Privacy and Security Committee session. The mid-year meeting consists of a series of committee and task team meetings that provide project updates and face-to-face work time on in-process projects. Nearly 200 attendees took part in council and committee sessions related to seed, grain and feed, specialty chemicals, crop nutrition, crop protection, data privacy, precision agriculture, allied providers, standards and guidelines, education and communications. AgGateway is a non-profit consortium of more than 180 member businesses serving the agriculture industry, with a mission to promote, enable and expand eAgriculture.

### ***National County Agent Professional Improvement Conference***

NCIS participated in the 2017 National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NAACA) Professional Improvement Conference, in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 11. NCIS sponsored a three-



Members of the Crop-Hail Actuarial and Statistics Committee gathered for the fall meeting at the NCIS office in October.

hour “Issues in Agricultural Economics Super Seminar” focused on providing extension educators with information that will strengthen their ability to help farmers and ranchers prepare for and manage risk. Laurence Crane reviewed crop insurance participation in the western United States, the growth in use of Whole-Farm Revenue Protection in the Northwest, and discussed using crop insurance as an effective tool to prepare for and economically survive crop failures due to insurable causes of loss. More than 1,300 extension professionals from across the country attended the four-day conference.

### *AAEA Meeting*

Drs. Tom Zacharias, Harun Bulut, Laurence Crane, and Mickey Paggi represented NCIS at the 2017 Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) annual meeting held in Chicago, Ill. The AAEA is a forum for scholarly work in agricultural economics with about 1,500 agricultural and applied economists attended.

In a session concerning farmers’ limited SCO/STAX uptake, Harun gave a presentation entitled, “Are U.S. Farmers’ Insurance Choices Optimal, Constrained-Optimal, or Sub-Optimal?” and Mickey moderated the session. Harun also took over the chairman responsibility for the Applied Risk Analysis (ARA) section within the AAEA. As part of his leadership role with the section, Harun organized five sessions and the ARA section luncheon at the meeting. The luncheon featured Professor Robert Klein of Georgia State University who gave a presentation entitled “Regulation and Markets in Catastrophe Insurance.” Tom participated in two sessions entitled, “Crop Insurance: Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Industry” and “Risk Management Programs and the Next Farm Bill.” Laurence accepted an award recognizing his service as an elected At-Large board member of the AAEA Extension Section Executive Committee. He also represented NCIS in the Committee on the Opportunities and Status of Blacks in Agricultural Economics-sponsored activities at the conference.

### *Pennsylvania Crop Insurance Conference*

NCIS participated in the 17th Annual Pennsylvania Crop Insurance Conference in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The purpose of the conference is to provide crop insurance agents and other allied professionals with updated information on the crop insurance program, agricultural policy and risk management. Laurence Crane



**Laurence Crane** (center) and extension educators met to plan for the 2018 Risk Management Education sessions in Arkansas.

made a presentation on the basics of risk management and the importance of risk planning. He also shared insights gained from the risk management workshops he has been conducting for small, limited-resource, and socially disadvantaged farmers.

### *International Association of Agricultural Production Insurers*

The 34th Congress of the International Association of Agricultural Production Insurers (AIAG) took place October 1-4 in Warsaw, Poland. The theme of the Congress was “Climate

Change, Remote Sensing and Big Data — New Challenges for Agricultural Insurance,” which drew more than 300 participants from 39 countries. Speakers representing the United States were Robert Johansson, Chief Economist of USDA, who presented “Agricultural Development — Global and in the U.S.” and Tom Zacharias, president of NCIS and vice president of AIAG, who discussed, “Outlook on Crop and Revenue Insurance in the U.S.” Other issues discussed included the implications of climate change for crop insurance and livestock disease, followed by overviews of the agriculture insur-



**Ken Root**, Iowa Agribusiness Radio Network (right) interviewed **Tom Zacharias** at the 74th annual National Association of Farm Broadcasting Convention.

ance programs in Poland, China, France, Russia, and South America.

### ***Agronomy Society, Crop Science Society, and Soil Society Annual Convention***

Mark Zarnstorff and James Houx attended the Agronomy Society of America/Crop Science Society of America/Soil Science Society of America annual meetings in October. These societies are the primary professional organizations for agriculture researchers in the United States and worldwide. The meetings bring together industry and academic researchers in agronomy, crop science, and soil science for presentations on current research. Mark and James used this opportunity to hear from researchers about the latest research being conducted at land-grant universities and elsewhere, and to keep track of trends in agriculture research. Most of the researchers involved in NCIS-sponsored research projects attend these meetings and the venue provided opportunity to gather as a group to discuss the challenges and outcomes from the past year, as well as discuss the upcoming year's research.

### ***National FFA Convention & Expo***

NCIS participated in the 90th National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis, IN, October 26. More than 65,000 FFA members from across the United States, representing all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, attended the four-day convention. NCIS sponsors the Diversified Crop Production-Placement Proficiency Award, recognizing students who work for a farmer and use the best management practices available to produce and manage crops. Laurence Crane participated as a judge for the award where four finalists presented their Supervised Agricultural Experience and answered questions from a panel of judges.

### ***Trade Talk***

Tom Zacharias and Laurie Langstraat participated in the National Association of Farm Broadcasting's annual Trade Talk event on November 9. Several farm broadcasters visited the NCIS booth to discuss crop insurance and its importance to America's farmers and ranchers. John Block, former Secretary of Agriculture (1981-86), also stopped by the booth and said he still supports a strong crop insurance program and to "keep up the good work."



Whole-Farm Revenue Protection training took place in Savannah, Georgia, in September. More than 115 people from NCIS member companies and RMA regional and compliance offices attended.

### ***Agriculture Future of America Leaders Conference and Opportunity Fair***

Laurie Langstraat participated in the Agriculture Future of America (AFA) Leaders Conference and Opportunity Fair in early November. AFA Leaders Conference provides support for college students who are preparing for careers in agriculture-related fields, while at the same time, supporting the development of human capital for the agriculture and food industry. The Opportunity Fair provides students with the chance to network and learn from industry professionals, and search out opportunities for internships and full-time employment. The 800 students that participated went through an extensive application process in order to be selected to attend, and are considered some of the best and brightest agriculture students in the country.

### ***New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference and Trade Show***

NCIS participated in the 21st New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference and Trade Show in Manchester, NH, in December. The conference is held every other year and features 30 educational sessions over three days. Laurence Crane participated in the conference and coordinated NCIS trade show activities with extension educators from Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. He interacted with many of the 1,500 growers and educators registered for the conference who were interested in learning more about using crop insurance to manage risks.

### ***Rural Coalition Winter Forum and Gala***

Laurence Crane attended the 9th Annual Rural Coalition Winter Forum and Gala in early December. The Rural Coalition members discussed current issues and set priorities for future farm policy advocacy. Laurence partic-

ipated in the forum discussions and presented an update on current crop insurance programs and activities that NCIS utilizes to reach small, limited-resource, and socially disadvantaged farmers. The Rural Coalition is a grassroots-oriented and culturally-diverse alliance of farmers, farmworkers, indigenous, migrant, and working people from the United States, Mexico, and Canada. It includes more than 90 grassroots member organizations serving as a critical advocacy voice for African-American, American-Indian, Asian-American, Euro-American, Latino, and women farmers, ranchers, farmworkers, and rural communities.

### ***Risk Management Education and Presentations***

Working at times in partnership with RMA and at times by itself, NCIS conducts seminars on risk management for limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and others interested in better managing risk. The goal is that helping farmers develop better risk management tools will ensure their long-term viability.

### ***Risk Management Workshops in Delaware and Maryland***

NCIS partnered with extension educators at Delaware State University and the University of Maryland—Eastern Shore (both 1890 land-grant universities) to teach a series of risk management planning workshops to beginning, limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers in Maryland and Delaware. NCIS conducted one workshop each month in Harrington, Del., and Upper Marlboro, Md., in January, February, and March. The objective of the activity was to help farmers and ranchers understand their risk exposure and develop risk management plans for their farms. The training consisted of a series of three workshops (18 hours) and 60 hours of individualized instruction. During these workshops, each participant set risk management goals in

five different areas — production, marketing, financial, human resource, and legal — and delineated three specific actions to reach each goal. Over the three months of classroom instruction, extension educators worked closely with the participants to ensure they were understanding the process and completing homework prior to the next class. Funding for the project was from a competitive grant prepared by NCIS and selected by the Northeast Extension Risk Management Education Center (NERMEC), operated by the University of Delaware. The NERMEC is funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Laurence Crane was project director and primary instructor of this activity.

### ***Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association Conference***

NCIS participated as an exhibitor at the RINLA (Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association) Winter Meeting and Expo in West Kingston, R.I., in late January. More than 300 growers and allied professionals from the green industry attended the conference. Laurence Crane visited with interested attendees about nursery insurance and WFRP. Participation in this conference is a component of the Risk Management Education and Outreach that NCIS is conducting for the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension as part of the Targeted States Program funded by RMA. The purpose of the program is to deliver crop insurance education and information to U.S. agricultural producers in states where there traditionally is a low level of Federal crop insurance participation and availability.

### ***North Carolina Small Farms Week***

NCIS participated as a sponsor of North Carolina A&T State University Small Farms Week Kickoff at the Sampson County Exposition Center in Clinton, N.C., March 20. More than 200 participants attended the week-long series of events recognizing the contributions small farms make to the North Carolina farm economy and promoting best management practices. The morning was spent with speakers discussing contemporary issues facing agricultural producers in that state with special emphasis on the challenges and solutions for small farms to compete. The afternoon consisted of tours to three farms where innovative and successful production practices have been implemented, enabling these farms to increase their profitability. Laurence Crane



A delegation of Serbian Fellows visited NCIS on November 3 to learn about how crop insurance works in the United States.

participated in the activities and discussed using crop insurance as a tool to manage risk with interested participants.

### ***Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD) Symposium***

NCIS participated as a sponsor and exhibitor in the 17th biennial 1890 ARD Symposium in Atlanta, Ga., in early April. The Association of 1890 Research Directors (ARD) is the federation of the 19 autonomous 1890 land grant universities that provides coordination of research initiatives among member 1890 institutions in cooperation with Federal, state, and private partners. The symposium, which is held every other year, provides the opportunity for scientists and students to present research papers and posters that share innovative and practical research findings in the food and agricultural sciences. The Symposium attracted more than 1,000 registered participants and more than 500 research papers and posters were presented focusing on the theme of the Symposium, "1890 Research: Meeting 21st Century Challenges Through Innovation." Laurence Crane attended the event and discussed crop insurance career opportunities with students.

### ***Extension Risk Management Education National Conference***

NCIS participated in the 2017 Extension Risk Management Education National Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, which brought together more than 250 private and public-sector educators, crop insurance agents, lenders, and other agricultural professionals. The annual conference allows this diverse group to share ongoing and emerging successful risk management education efforts that target agricultural producers and their fam-

ilies. The 2016 risk management education project, directed by Laurence Crane in Mississippi helping limited-resource farmers develop marketing plans, was selected for presentation. Laurence also provided an overview of other NCIS outreach efforts.

### ***Risk Management Workshops-Alabama***

NCIS partnered with extension educators at Tuskegee University in Alabama to teach a series of risk management planning workshops to limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers in the Strike Force counties of Alabama. The objective was to help farmers and ranchers understand their risk exposure and develop risk management plans for their farms. This training consisted of a series of three workshops and 60 hours of individualized instruction. NCIS conducted the three workshops once per month in Tuskegee, Ala., in March, April, and May. During the workshops, each participant set risk management goals in five different areas — production, marketing, financial, human resource, legal — and delineated three specific actions to reach each goal. Over the three months, local extension educators worked individually with these producers to ensure they took the fifteen actions and reached their goals. Funding for the project was from a competitively awarded Cooperative Agreement with RMA. Laurence Crane was project director and primary instructor of this activity.

### ***Marketing Planning Workshops-North Carolina and South Carolina***

NCIS partnered with extension educators at North Carolina A&T State University and

South Carolina State University to teach a series of workshops on marketing to limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers in the Strike Force counties in the Carolinas. The objective was to help farmers and ranchers understand their risk exposure and develop marketing plans and strategies for their farms. The training consisted of a series of three workshops and 60 hours of individualized instruction. NCIS conducted the workshops in Clinton and Lumberton, N.C., and Bowman, S.C., once a month in May, June, and July. During these workshops, each participant was instructed in how to use the business planning approach to evaluate their risk exposure and was introduced to the five decision variables that compose the “marketing mix”—product, price, place, promotion, and people. Participants were given a homework assignment to complete before the next workshops. Funding for the project was from a competitively awarded Cooperative Agreement with RMA. Laurence Crane was project director and primary instructor of this activity.

### ***Marketing Risk Management-Arkansas Planning Session***

NCIS is partnering with extension educators at the University of Arkansas – Pine Bluff (UAPB) in 2018 to teach a series of workshops to historically under-served farmers in Arkansas enabling them to manage their marketing risks. The objective is to help farmers and ranchers understand their risk exposure, determine their costs of production, and develop marketing plans for their farms. Laurence Crane conducted a planning and orientation session in October with extension educators who will be involved in the project. The project will consist of a series of workshops and 60 hours of individualized instruction beginning in the Spring of 2018. This project is the result of a competitive proposal prepared by NCIS and selected by the Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center’s (SERMEC) Advisory Council for funding. The SERMEC, operated by the University of Arkansas, is funded by USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

### ***1890 Scholarship Recipients***

NCIS annually awards scholarships to students majoring in an agricultural discipline and enrolled at a 1980 Land-Grant University. In 2017, three worthy students were selected to receive scholarships. The recipients are Terynn, Riles, majoring in Regulatory Science-Envi-



The room was full of company underwriters and trainers at the November NCIS Train the Trainer Conference.

ronmental Biology at the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff; Chanelle Quinn, majoring in Animal Science at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO; and, Tatayana Kennedy, majoring in Environmental Science at Alabama A&M University in Huntsville. The purpose of this scholarship program is to enable deserving students to further their education and to expose them to the crop insurance business.

### ***Oklahoma Black Farmers Association Small Farm Conference***

The Oklahoma Black Farmers Association held its 19th Annual Small Farm Conference in Oklahoma City, in mid-November. Several USDA agencies were in attendance, including the Oklahoma City RMA Regional Office who discussed written agreements with the group. NCIS was a sponsor for the event that drew 100 farmers and professionals. Laurence Crane attended and delivered a presentation on using crop insurance to help manage risk and protect revenue. He also introduced the risk management education workshops he is conducting in Oklahoma.

### ***Professional Agricultural Workers’ Conference***

NCIS co-sponsored the 75th Professional Agricultural Workers’ Conference (PAWC) at Tuskegee University in early December. Laurence Crane spoke to the 450 conference participants and provided information on using crop insurance to effectively manage risk. The PAWC began in 1942 mainly with Tuskegee University and local and state support and participation. It is now international in scope including representatives from several African countries, the national land grant community, and state, Federal, and private sectors. Its mission is to enhance the skills and contributions of agricultural and related professionals involved in discovery, dissemination and use of emerging technologies, information, problem solving, policy formation, and strategy development for the advancement of people and communities.

## **Awards and Publications**

NCIS is proud of the work of the entire NCIS staff. Each year, staff strives to provide the best product, data analysis, insight, and counsel for our membership. Sometimes, the excellent work of NCIS is recognized outside of the industry, and we are happy to share a few of those accolades with you below.

### ***NCIS Outreach Activities Recognized***

At the Extension Risk Management Education National Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, Laurence Crane received an “Outstanding Outreach Award” from the Southern Extension Risk Management Education Center (SERMEC). The risk management education project, directed by Laurence in South Carolina that helps limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers develop personal risk management plans, was one of three projects selected for recognition. The NCIS project was selected by the Center’s Advisory Council for recognition because the project: 1) effectively reached and immediately helped limited-resource farmers; 2) used innovative teaching methods; and, 3) has the potential for long-term positive impacts for the target audience. The SERMEC, operated by the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, is funded by USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

### ***NCIS Recognized for Limited-Resource and Socially Disadvantaged Producers Project***

The Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC) designated the NCIS 2014-15 project, “Developing Personal Risk Management Plans for Limited-Resource and Socially Disadvantaged Producers in South Carolina” as one of its top projects. This project was under the direction of Laurence Crane. Ronald Rainey, SRMEC Center Director, and Erica Fields, SRMEC Project Manager, had this to say about the project: “Your project distinguished itself among the other outreach efforts because

of your innovative use of technology, solid impacts, and evaluation process.”

### **Award of Professional Excellence**

The Extension Section of the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (AAEA) presented Laurence Crane with the “Award of Professional Excellence” for his service as a member of the Extension Section Executive Board. Laurence has been an AAEA member since 1988, served as secretary to the Extension Section Executive Board from 2005-2008, and in 2014 was elected by the Section membership to serve a three-year term on the Board as an At-Large Director. He is a vocal advocate for the private crop insurance industry and is respected for his perspective on applied risk management education and work with limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and educators.

### **Managing Catastrophic Risk in Agriculture**

Harun Bulut published a peer-reviewed journal article in the *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* (JARE). The JARE is the official publication of the Western Agricultural Economics Association. The article, entitled “Managing Catastrophic Risk in Agriculture through Ex Ante Subsidized Insurance or Ex Post Disaster Aid,” can be found on the journal’s website at <http://bit.ly/2Aku3gt>.

### **U.S. Farmers Insurance Choices**

“U.S. Farmers’ Insurance Choices under Budget Heuristics,” another peer-reviewed journal written by Harun Bulut was published in *Agricultural Finance Review* in December. *Agricultural Finance Review* provides a rigorous forum for the publication of theory and empirical work related solely to issues in agricultural and agribusiness finance. The article can be found at <http://bit.ly/2mcZfof>.

### **Adjuster Continuing Education**

NCIS schools and field days are an integral part of loss adjuster education, and they complement the training conducted by individual crop insurance companies. A full update on the 2017 NCIS schools and field days can be found in the November issue of *Crop Insurance TODAY*®, but here are a few important facts from those events:

- There were 17 schools/field days held in 15 states;
- 1,229 adjusters attended one or more of the schools;



RMA organized Whole-Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) Informational Meetings for participants in the East and Northeast. Invited attendees included agents, RMA Risk Management Partners, and AIP representatives.

- There were 170 plot leaders who led training through hands-on field exercises;
- 53 continuing education credit hours were approved in Texas, Wyoming and Oklahoma, and 158 adjusters received those hours;
- Adjusters studied 22 Crop-Hail and MPCII crop policies and loss procedures at the schools, including: pecan tree, sugarcane, chickpea, forage, oats, mint, blueberry, and many others.

### **Additional Activities**

The items above are just a snapshot of some of the activities NCIS staff participates in on behalf of the industry. The days are full of day-to-day tasks like answering member company questions, analyzing policy changes, reviewing research data, and a plethora of other “to dos” that arise every day. A few additional activities include:

- RMA released or revised more than 15 Loss Adjustment Standards Handbooks – most changes were rudimentary, primarily to conform with RMA’s new handbook formatting requirements, but still required staff time to review and comment. Some of the handbooks included Florida Fruit Tree, Machine-Harvested Pickling Cucumber, ARH Strawberry, Cabbage, Olives, and others.
- RMA released or revised 20 Insurance Standards Handbooks, including Margin Protection, Malting Barley, and Pistachio Pilot. The most significant was the 2018 Whole-Farm Revenue Policy and handbook that were revised for the third year in a row.
- There were 10 new or revised policies that needed review and comment, including Hybrid Sweet Corn Seed and APH Sesame. The most significant policy change for the 2018 crop year was a Replant and Double Cropping CCIP Basic Provisions Amendment published in June and the CCIP and ARPI

Basic Provisions and CAT Endorsement that were updated in late November. These changes resulted in subsequent updates to the General Standards, Crop Insurance, and Document and Supplement Standards Handbooks, which had been updated earlier in the year. The Crop Insurance Handbook was actually updated a total of three times in 2017 for the 2018 crop year.

- Cultivated Clams Pilot and California Avocado Pilot programs were converted to permanent status.
- Each month, NCIS releases “Asked & Answered,” a compilation of the questions asked by NCIS member companies of staff that month, and the answers provided. In 2017, there was a total of 204 questions “asked & answered,” averaging 17 per month.
- Staff prepared 36 agent and adjuster competency exams for member companies.
- There were 12 opinion-editorial pieces placed in 10 states throughout the U.S. including the *Kansas City Star*, *Des Moines Register*, *High Plains Journal*, and the *Omaha World-Herald*.
- NCIS conducted 25 agronomic research projects in conjunction with land-grant universities in the U.S. and one in Canada. Crops included: chile peppers, milo, popcorn, cotton, potatoes, chickpeas, and others.

NCIS staff provided many other daily services to our membership including IT and processing support, state insurance department form filings, membership support, Final Average Loss Calculation (FALC) analysis, and others. We are proud of what we do to serve our membership and the entire industry. And we remain committed to providing excellent service throughout 2018. We appreciate the support of our members and thank you for your commitment to our organization.